2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

liminary grades in order to enhance the dignity of those few who had reached the highest rank. In Atchin, on the other hand, owing to the communal nature of the rite and the mutual help afforded by every member of the village community to every other member, a contrary process was at work, the lower grades being already in process of elimination before the arrival of the white man. With the acquisition of the new wealth this process became speeded up, with the result that by the time of my visit they had all disappeared, so that each and every man, youth, and male piccaninny on the island who was capable of sacrificing a pig belonged to the grade *Mal*, much to the chagrin of those in other communities who had taken a lifetime achieving it. Even the older men on Atchin felt somewhat abashed by the general levelling-up, and, in order to assert their own superiority, a new supernumerary grade had been invented, called *Mel-teg*, literally "The *Mal* who stays at home," referring to the vows of abstinence taken after the *Maki*. It is amusing and significant to note that, according to Mr. Harrisson, the young men have again asserted their equality and that now most men on Atchin possess the title *Mel-teg*, and apparently for the moment, in this respect at any rate, democracy has reasserted itself, for there is no record of any further supernumerary grade.

The younger generation of natives made use of the white man's coming not only in the direction of freeing themselves from the domination of the older men. With the acute dramatic sense which is the essence of their culture they had also made up to some extent for other deprivations which the white man had brought about by using both him and his inventions for the enhancement of their already rich ritual life. Pantomimic representations of various aspects of the white man's activities had been incorporated into the dramatic repertory of the *na-leng* plays and dances, muskets were used to heighten the effect of ritual combats during the sex-initiatory expedition to Omba, into the more serious initiation rites on Atchin, in which hoaxes are performed on the initiates, more than one white man's *tour de force* was incorporated, and many of the masks and images were made lurid by means of Reckett's blue.

It is however significant to note that, even in the case of such a wide departure from native tradition as the abandonment of the manufacture of their own long-distance canoes in favour of white men's whale-boats, the old consecration rites were still continued. At one such consecration rite at which I was present over sixty valuable tusked boars were sacrificed, and the supreme sacrifice was that of a bullock, obtained from a trader, for which all the complicated sacrificial ritual was performed; while in the pantomimic dances the skulls of a bullock and two goats were used as masks.

One final word as to the causes of depopulation. At the time of my visit the population was on the decline. Of physical causes the chief was, as has been seen, the introduction of the musket which turned comparatively harmless semi-ritual combats into lethal battles. Second to this, the introduction of diseases, mainly of dysentery, which wiped out whole families. As to the psychological causes put forward by Rivers and others but denied by Mr. Harrisson, all I am able to say quite definitely is that there was at that time a general belief among the older men and some of the young ones that the race was doomed. The old men remembered the day when native culture was the highest achievement of the human race as they conceived it. The appearance

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
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From the first missionary, John Williams, murdered in 1839, until the present day, these devoted men, working according to their own lights, meeting often with sudden death, have been the only influence for good and sanity of any sort; even had they accomplished nothing, the missionaries would be the best people in island history. It was not always the Mission who converted the people or disrupted the native civilization. It was the chaos of endless new unknown diseases, the fundamental cultural upset due to iron and firearms. In seeking protection from these and from the other whites who brought them, the natives came to the missionary. The early records of the group are a ghastly list of introduced diseases—scarlet fever, measles, consumption, smallpox, phthisis, gonorrhoea, whooping cough, influenza, diphtheria, meningitis—all fatal to these people. The population, particularly where it was much in contact with whites, was decimated. Their culture was based on a certain speed, rhythm, and age-cycle; the sudden death of artist, magician, or chief upset the whole. The old beliefs, ancient gods, counter-magics, and native herbs, could do nothing; so they turned to the white man's god, who must be stronger than their own. The new trend among the missionized people, as it gathers internal momentum, shows signs of turning against its instigators, the white missionaries. So far experiments in founding a native-run church have regularly failed. The new motive power is economic rather than religious; some revival of passive heathenism is an ingredient. The price of copra, regulated by the combines far away in Europe, has become in many ways the determining factor. During the period of my visit copra prices reached their lowest level. The missionized natives have become dependent on their coconuts to earn them money for knives, calico, tobacco, belts, even bread, rice, and tinned meat—the substitutes for "heathen" things that have become extinct through mission influence. Low prices mean little money and a standard of living reduced below the level of the last thirty years, in many ways below that of the heathen bushmen. This annoys the native against the white, who has created these demands and will not satisfy them; and a shirt has become the essential symbol of a mission native, to such an extent that without a shirt he feels no longer Christian. I doubt if the group has within sight an important economic future for the white man, despite the recent optimistic accounts of Archimbaud (1927) and Lop (1933). The Chinese and Japanese are rapidly gaining economic power; they may find in these fever- and cyclone-ridden islands an important outlet. Half-castes are not numerous. French ones rank equal with pure Frenchmen as citizens, and run many French plantations.

Recently the administration have to some extent changed their policy, for example in relation to trouble within the native community and in appointing me to pacify the Big Nambas. The native will therefore expect more arbitration in future; if it is not provided, the administration will be discredited, to the danger of all whites.

So the age-long cycle goes on. The native population was never stable, either in culture or in numbers. When Quiros came the population was about at a peak in the north; now it has reached a trough, on the interminable up and down of all races. It is time for the Melanesian to climb again. He is climbing wherever conditions are at all favourable. And the vital question

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but they do not attempt to help the heathens, unless the heathens come down to the often unhealthy coast and adopt the externals of Christianity. The Missions do not go to the natives, and in Santo, Malekula, and Malo, out of about six thousand Christians, only thirty live away from the sea. In the hills there is no malaria, consumption, or elephantiasis; when the hill-men come to the sea they quickly go down with fever, and the slightest additional sickness will kill them. Mission history is a ghastly list of great settlements created by the Missions on the coast, and now almost or entirely extinct. Aneityum, west Malekula, and west Santo show plenty of examples. I have already made the point that it is similarly fatal for missions to neglect their converts in outlying districts; this is done all over the group. The recruiters do the same

thing, only in a different way, by taking bush natives to work in plantations; they are more concerned to keep their men well, because if a man dies his tribe will not work for that recruiter any more. Long ago Anthony Trollope wrote a delightful account of the benefits due to Queensland blackbirding; Campbell (1874, p. 69), whose account of the southern isles in 1864 is lucid and unbiased, demonstrated the fallacy in Trollope's reasoning, and further pointed out that ex-plantation natives often become the most dangerous on their return to the bush, which is equally true to-day, especially of trained native police.

In my section of the Big Nambas I have shown that modern warfare, unlike the old form, is socially harmful; all natives should be disarmed; vigorous medical work started and maintained throughout the islands; the fish *Bam-*

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bunia introduced to destroy mosquito larvae; the movements of hill people to the sea controlled; no women should be allowed to work on a plantation. If these steps are taken the physical conservation of the bushman may be achieved.

The cultural conservation technique cannot be expressed so concretely. It is too late to preserve the pattern complete. There is however a good alternative, and I can best give my point of view by describing a concrete example of what can happen with proper guidance or good luck, as on the island of Atchin.

(ii) *Atchin*, 1935.—There is no doubt that on small islands a mile or less across health is much better and *Anopheles* mosquitoes are often absent. They are the small island populations which are increasing most rapidly throughout the group, though some are still decreasing, and in these islands I see the best future of the race. Most have mainly mission populations, but on some heathens are dominant. One such is Atchin, half a mile off the east coast of Malekula; of the four hundred and eighty natives less than two dozen are Christians. A Seventh Day Adventist missionary lived there for many years, and all the other missions maintain native teachers there. The missions have had no success, but the natives got some ideas from them which they have incorporated into their own culture. More valuable has proved the visit of an anthropologist, John W. Layard. He was there more than twenty years ago, but to this day is remembered as Taoni (Johnny). He gained a remarkable understanding of the Atchinese, and his sympathy greatly encouraged the people to keep up their old heathen customs. Like all Hebrideans, the Atchinese sold land to the whites for a few guns in the early days. Unlike all the rest, they have since bought it back. Their country is their own. As their yam gardens are on the mainland, they are expert canoeists; they still keep up the old canoe voyages to Ambrym, trading penis-wrappers for pigs; to Malo, Santo, and east Malekula. The old turmeric-dye leaf trade has been taken over by French ships, and for some years now there has been no ritual sex-initiation voyage to Omba, home of the benign deity Ta-har (= Tagaro). The best fishermen, whole villages club their copra together to get a modern European drag net; but do not let decay the ancient stone-wall trap, a sort of lobster-pot, and the special handnets for the Palolo worm, which at certain seasons appears in millions, giving its name to three of the lunar months. They run their own stores and sell their own copra to the highest bidder of the several ships that call in search of this lucrative trade. They encourage whites to visit but not to stop. They make sham spears to sell to world-touring yachts which call regularly to see these remarkably safe savages; the real spears they do not show. They have twice done all their dances for film companies, in no way to the detriment of the dance culture or significance, rather the opposite. Baker (1935, p. 212) says of the Sakaus, Santo: "If they had been persuaded to dance for the tourists it would have been the beginning of the break-up of their culture, in which dancing plays an important part. . . . The prostitution of their culture by tourists would be deleterious not only to themselves but also to social anthropology." Apart from the fact that the Sakaus have unfortunately lost, almost forgotten, the whole dance-cycle of the highest chiefly grade (*vuster*), and that the special dance for the marriage of a